

# Building boss charged with fraud living in \$2m home

34-year-old second to be charged in crackdown on illegal workers

Sam Hurley and Jared Savage

An Auckland building company boss charged with immigration fraud lives in a \$2.3m home and drives a late model Porsche.

Hooi Keat Chai faces 26 charges of lying to immigration officials over 12 years to get workers fraudulent visas to come to New Zealand. Immigration New Zealand alleges the 34-year-old previously lived in New Zealand unlawfully under the name Kok Tong Chai but changed his name in Malaysia and then returned under the new identity.

His home in the affluent Auckland suburb of St Johns was raided by INZ investigators this week and Chai, who introduces himself as Ben, became the second individual charged in Operation Spectrum.

The *Weekend Herald* last week revealed nearly 200 illegal workers were either deported, fled New Zealand or stopped at the border following the six-month inquiry into the construction industry in Auckland.

Chai is the sole director and shareholder of Team NZ Constructions Ltd, one of the 10 companies targeted by INZ in a bid to disrupt the flow of illegal workers from Malaysia.

Operation Spectrum also uncovered a weakness in border security whereby 15 people previously deported or who fled from New Zealand were able to return under new identities.

Chai is one of two individuals who allegedly went on to obtain permanent residency.

He was charged in the Auckland District Court and bailed to his \$2.3m home, where five vehicles – including a 2017 Porsche Cayenne – are registered in his name on finance records.

Operation Spectrum targeted companies which recruited unlawful workers from Malaysia as plasterers, painters, tilers or carpenters.

They worked as third-tier subcontractors, below the radar of developers and site managers.

There was little evidence of workers living in poor conditions, or being exploited against their will.

Most were paid \$20 to \$40 an hour in cash – paying no tax – so those running the underground crews were able to win contracts by undercutting the prices of legitimate competitors.

“It was common to hear ‘we got paid every Thursday by a man in a black Audi’,” said Alistair Murray, who manages investigations and compliance for INZ.

“We are talking significant cash flow, hundreds of thousands of dollars.

“So Kiwis are being cut out of jobs. Legitimate Kiwi businesses trying to contract in that market can’t compete with those rates. It’s not a level playing field.”

Immigration New Zealand raided construction sites around Auckland

## Operation Spectrum

54

deported

36

voluntarily left NZ

15

served deportation notices (no work visa)

85

stopped at border

190

people stopped from illegally working in NZ

**Hooi Keat Chai allegedly lied to immigration to get workers into NZ.**



Rachel Hunter with the kiwi she named Matariki. Picture / Jason Oxenham

## Rach reaches for the stars to save our kiwi

Ophelia Buckleton

A baby kiwi is strutting her stuff in the wild after being named and set free by supermodel Rachel Hunter.

Hunter named the 3-week-old kiwi Matariki, after the star cluster that signals the beginning of the Maori New Year. The chick was released on Motutapu Island in Auckland’s Hauraki Gulf.

Hunter said: “I love the stars and I just thought it was fitting for her. She’s gorgeous, she’s special. She was feisty on the way over [to Motutapu] and then a superstar when she came out [into the wild] and kind of

just chilled out and fell asleep.”

A group, including people from the Department of Conservation, Motutapu Restoration Trust and local iwi Ngai Tai Ki Tamaki, gathered to watch and help Hunter release the kiwi into the bush.

“I’m very, very honoured and very, very lucky,” she said. “We know how sacred they are to their environments out in the wild . . . and to be able to come out here and release one into the wild is super special.”

Matariki, weighing less than 500 grams, was hatched at Auckland Zoo from an egg collected in the Coro-

mandel. She will join 55 other Coromandel brown kiwi on pest-free Motutapu, including Whauwhau, who was released by former Prime Minister John Key and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014.

The number of kiwi released on the island has risen since May 2017 as part of charity Kiwis for Kiwi’s aim to increase each species of our national bird by 2 per cent a year.

The charity’s efforts, drawing on an \$11 million government grant to save the kiwi, worked in step with DoC’s decade-long kiwi recovery plan, which had a goal of lifting the total kiwi population back to

100,000 by 2030. Keith Gell, DoC Auckland inner islands operations manager, said the vision was for Motutapu to become a creche for kiwis so, when the population became big enough, surplus birds could be used to boost numbers elsewhere.

Yesterday’s release was also a chance for Hunter to catch up on some of the conservation work happening on Motutapu.

The supermodel has been paid \$50,000 by Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development to be an international ambassador for the city.

## Rich-lister builds nearly 250 homes for Auckland’s poor

Anne Gibson

One of New Zealand’s richest men, whose family is estimated to control \$570 million, is building 243 new social houses for Auckland’s poor.

In a rare interview, Ted Manson, 63, head of developers TCLM, showed off new projects in Glen Eden, the central city and Avondale, saying he was responding to areas of greatest need.

The Ted Manson Foundation is building \$160m of social housing in a move that has won plaudits.

The foundation’s projects include: ● Twin-tower 10 and 11-level 165-unit blocks (90 social housing), Glen Eden; ● An 18-level CBD Liverpool St



Ted Manson

Tower, 92 apartments (73 social); ● Great North Rd, Avondale, a site for 140 units (80 social). ● Examining other opportunities elsewhere in Auckland.

Leonie Freeman, a former Housing New Zealand general manager and a current Goodman Property

Trust director, said Manson’s contribution was “astonishing”. The fact that it came from the generosity of one man made it even more so.

Ministry of Social Development housing deputy chief executive Scott Gallacher said the state entity was “really happy” to be partnering with the foundation and strongly supported its commitment to large-scale public housing.

Mansons TCLM has a \$1 billion order book and its projects included Shortland St office tower the Lumley Centre, the Spark office campus on Victoria St West, BDO House where NZME is based and many other CBD office blocks.

Last year’s *NBR* Rich List had the Manson family at \$570m, saying the

big-time development and investment business had “another strong year”.

Manson told the *Weekend Herald* he had grown up in a state house, always thinking anyone could succeed like him and believing most people could buy their own house.

“I woke up one day and got a social conscience. That happens at some stage of your life for some, but not for all. Up until then, I was a capitalist,” Manson said.

“I’m not doing it for profit. I’m making no money. I’m giving money away,” he said of the projects.

Full story

Weekend business C3

## In brief

### Departure cards may go

The departure card that must be filled out by every passenger leaving New Zealand may soon be history. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern called them a “bugbear” when talking to a business audience in Sydney. “I will be talking to my ministers of statistics [James Shaw] and customs [Meka Whaitiri] with a view to advancing this,” she said. Australia got rid of them last year. She was speaking to about 1000 business people and delegates from the Australia New Zealand Leadership Forum, which has called for their removal. **More on talks A7**

### Greens renounce perks

Green Party ministers are making their ministerial diaries public and both politicians and staff will stop accepting corporate hospitality. The two transparency measures were announced by co-leader James Shaw to counter the influence of money and lobby groups in politics. He told a party conference in Napier many MPs considered a corporate box at the rugby or being shouted a fancy dinner a “delightful perk” of the job. “The problem is they’re not actually ‘free’ . . . These organisations . . . are doing it because they want to know there’s someone in Parliament or the Beehive who’s looking out for their interests.”

### Drivers fear foreigners

Kiwi motorists are concerned about overseas drivers although they are responsible for only 7 per cent of crashes. A Canstar Blue survey also shows that 45 per cent would be happy to see penalties increased for people at fault in a crash, while 35 per cent believed refresher driving courses would be a good idea. The results are from a survey of 546 New Zealanders who had hired a car in the past 12 months and come as the country faces a road toll similar to last year’s blowout of 379, a marked increase from 2013’s record low of 253 deaths.

### Army sticks with drones

The army says it has no plans to ground Chinese-made drones banned by its US allies over cyber-security fears. The Defence Force bought the shelf-hobbyist drones last March. The same drones, built by Chinese manufacturers Dajiang Innovation (DJI), were scrapped by the US Army last August because of “increased awareness of cyber vulnerabilities associated with DJI products”. A fortnight later, Shenzhen-based DJI announced a privacy mode to prevent flight data being shared to the internet.

### Grim outlook for gulf

Regulatory headaches, slow action and conflict are dogging efforts to save Auckland’s big blue backyard — now under unprecedented pressure from pollution and over-fishing. The Hauraki Gulf Forum’s damning stocktake, released yesterday, reveals the gulf is deteriorating faster than any management efforts could prevent. The forum’s leaders have made pressing calls for action to new Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage, who in turn has blamed the previous Government for its “neglect” — calling the latest triennial report an “indictment of past inaction”.

### Quarry attacker also rapist

The man who abducted, wounded and assaulted a 23-year-old woman at a West Auckland quarry was also found guilty of raping a second woman. Colin Jack Mitchell was found guilty in the High Court at Auckland of six charges relating to the two separate attacks — the first at Riverhead in February last year and the second at Avondale in 1992. DNA evidence linked him to the earlier rape. Suppression orders meant only the charges relating to the quarry attack could be reported. Mitchell, 60, also has a conviction for the rape of a sex worker in 1984.

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